28: Jenness E-5 (1914-1916) 1946
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CHAPTER I

MATERIAL RESOURCES

Few people have been called upon to sustain life and perpetuate their race on such meagre resources as the Copper Eskimo. Even if they had been acquainted with agriculture the climate debarred it, just as it debarred the growth of trees except in two or three sheltered valleys along the southern fringe of their territory. It restricted not only the flora but the fauna, leaving the natives dependent for their food and for much of their equipment on one land animal, the seasonally migrating caribou, and two sea mammals, the foetid and the bearded seals, supplemented by such fish as they could capture in rivers, lakes, and bays. Ignorant of all metals except their native copper, which seemed to them only a malleable stone, and cut off from contact with any but neighbouring tribes, little or no more advanced than themselves, they had to build up their lives on the scanty resources provided by their own narrow environment, and rely on their own ingenuity to supply all their needs.

The resources provided by their environment fall naturally into four groups:

Wood
Stone (including native copper and other minerals)
Bone, antler, horn, ivory
Hides and sinew.

WOOD

The Copper Eskimo obtained their wood from two sources. First, there was the driftwood, mainly spruce and cottonwood, carried to the ocean by Mackenzie River far to the westward and borne by the winds and currents to Dolphin and Union Strait and western bays of Victoria Island. Then in the valleys of three rivers that flowed into Coronation Gulf, Coppermine, Napaktauktauk, and Tree, there stood scattered groves of spruce, small and stunted, a few miles from the coast, but larger as one proceeded south. Far to the southeast, too, near Thelon River, were other stands of spruce that the Eskimo from Bathurst Inlet and from the eastern shores of Victoria Island occasionally visited in their wanderings. Thus the Copper Eskimo had abundant wood to satisfy all their needs; but as driftwood was very scarce in many districts, and the standing timber on the southern fringe of their territory could be reached only after a long journey overland, which many natives were disinclined to make, manufactured objects of wood were among the commonest articles of trade and passed freely from one end of the territory to the other. Moreover, so crude were the Eskimo tools, and so great the labour of cutting down the trees and hewing the timber into shape, that any object of moderate size, such as a sled-runner, a table, or even a tent-pole, commanded a high price.[1]

The principal tools used in working wood were the adze and the whittling knife (*See* pp. 100 and 103). Bone or antler wedges, generally made for each occasion and immediately discarded, served to split small logs and planks; they were driven home with boulders. Lacking saws, the Eskimo shortened a plank in one or other of three ways: they hacked it with the adze; gouged it across with the grooving tool (*See* p. 100); or they drilled a line of holes across it with the bow drill.

[1] Cf. Stefansson, V.: The Stefansson-Anderson Arctic Expeditions: Anth. Papers, Amer. Mus. of Nat. Hist., vol. XIV, pt. I, pp. 31, 32 *et al.*, New York, 1914.

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support a layer of turf fifteen or eighteen inches thick around the walls and two or three inches thick on the roof. Once the snow drifts over such a dwelling a room large enough to shelter several men can be made unbearably hot with a small wood-burning stove, even though there are two or three windows in the sides and a ventilator in the ceiling.

Our plans called for a one-roomed hut eighteen by twelve feet, oriented east and west, with a large three-paned window on the south face and a smaller two-paned window on the north. We had brought from Alaska 1,000 feet of roughly dressed lumber; for although the coast east and west of the delta of the Mackenzie River is strewn with driftwood for three or four hundred miles, hardly a single log can be found around Coronation Gulf, none of its rivers reaching back to the heavy forests. Some of us sorted out the lumber and dug post-holes; others cut squares of turf from a neighbouring meadow and transported them to the house-site on a dog-sled. We completed the framework in three days. Each man then undertook to construct one section of the outer wall of turf. Chipman laboured incessantly, as befitted the leader, and the wall in his section mounted rapidly toward the eave; but it suddenly collapsed when it reached two-thirds of its height, compelling him to begin over again from a wider base. None of us were carpenters by trade, and we worked to a large extent indepen-